17 June 2010

Henderson - Schools - Henderson High School

The new guy at Henderson High

By LUKE PARKER

Students at Henderson High School are getting to know their new principal this week.

Michael Purcell is looking forward to the challenges that lie ahead.

He returned to New Zealand at the start of the year after 18 months coaching and training with some of the world's top tennis players in London.

His 14-year-old son Rhett plays tennis for New Zealand and the experience has been helpful on a number of levels.

"I was really intrigued with how hard these young people work and it's something I'll be bringing to school here at Henderson," Mr Pucell says. "The work ethic and the striving to reach their goals was inspiring."

The 56-year-old grew up on the west coast of the South Island in Wataroa – a little town 20 minutes from Franz Josef Glacier.

He has taught, and been a principal, at numerous secondary schools including Karamu High School in Hastings were he was principal for eight years before going to London.

He also worked as a guidance counsellor and senior lecturer in education at Victoria University in Wellington.

"I was lecturing in educational psychology down there and really enjoyed it but I found I missed being at a secondary school," he says. "I like working with young people and I think you can make a difference when they're teenagers and in an environment where it is more personalised."

The father-of-one is passionate about sport, especially tennis.

Fresh face: Michael Purcell is the new principal at Henderson High School.

"I've played representative tennis for Hawkes Bay, Canterbury and Central Districts," he says. "I'm now playing senior reserve Karo Bowl which is the second-to-top division in Auckland."

He says getting students involved in sport helps give them a sense of belonging and identity.

He is also determined to bring a focus on academic performance.

"The school has to provide the support and the teaching to make this happen," he says. "Making the relationships between parents, teachers, and students work for the benefit and best interests of the students is very important to me."

Mr Purcell is also keen to maintain high standards of behaviour and personal appearance.

"I think it's vital and believe there's a link between performance, the way people behave and the way they present themselves."

He intends to get to know the 750 students in a short period of time.

"I want to get to know them as individuals and affirm what they are doing because we all need to be rewarded and acknowledged personally," he says.

"It's a difficult time for teenagers so the more positive affirmation they get the better."

Mr Purcell takes over from Joy Eaton who was principal for four years.

Western Leader
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